

This week Congress finished work on its final spending package for the year. This "Omnibus" bill contains many of the spending bills that did not get passed throughout the year. Last minute changes made by the Senate mean President Bush is likely to sign the legislation into law. What this bill means is lots more of Washington spending your money. And, with a year of talking and fighting about earmarks, we did not see a significant change in that area either. Especially disconcerting is the overseas spending. Let me point to just one example. In that portion of the bill for military construction, there were nearly one billion dollars in earmarks for spending overseas. Again, this is just in the portion for military construction projects. One dozen foreign countries will benefit from this taxpayer sponsored largess. Equally bad, we are building these new military facilities overseas while we continue to close our military bases here at home designed to defend the United States. During the most recent round of base closures, I introduced legislation that would halt base closures here in the United States while our men and women are engaged in combat missions in the Middle East. How odd is it that while this legislation failed to pass, we are now earmarking hundreds of millions of dollars for bases in countries such as Bahrain and Qatar? Our policy is gone awry, is costing us billions here, and billions there, totaling trillions of dollars when added up. Yet the last key piece of legislation passed by Congress this year does absolutely nothing to even begin to address this problem. In fact, as I have suggested here, it only exaggerates the problem. If this is Washington's idea of the spirit of Christmas and charity then it is a sick joke. This holiday season we should be more concerned about the less fortunate here in our own country. People are facing the possibility of losing their homes because of a mortgage crisis brought on by inflation, businesses are being pushed into bankruptcy by a burdensome regulatory state, and the tax code makes it hard for many people to afford basics like medical care, gasoline, and educational expenses for their children. America is a generous country, at this time of year that is more visible than ever. But, in this case, charity truly must start at home. We need to stop these overseas earmarks and put those dollars to work here in this country. We need to dredge our own ports and river mouths. We need to build bridges in America instead of constructing multi-billion dollar facilities abroad. And, most importantly, we need to allow people to keep their own resources so they can afford life's necessities, as well as the ability to support the charities of their own choosing. In the true spirit of Christmas charity Washington should have given back to hardworking taxpayers their own earnings. Despite the recent actions of Congress, I do hope everyone has a Merry Christmas and safe travels.